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WEST POINT OF TOMORROW

A Novel of the
Planet Patrol
By **ARTHUR
J. BURKS**

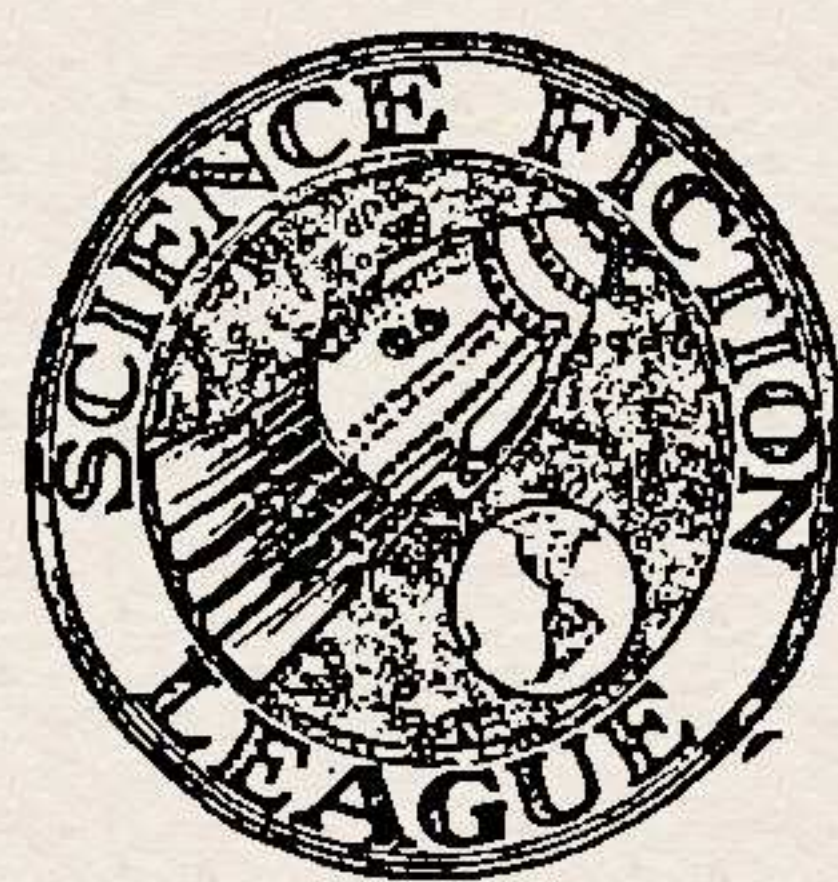


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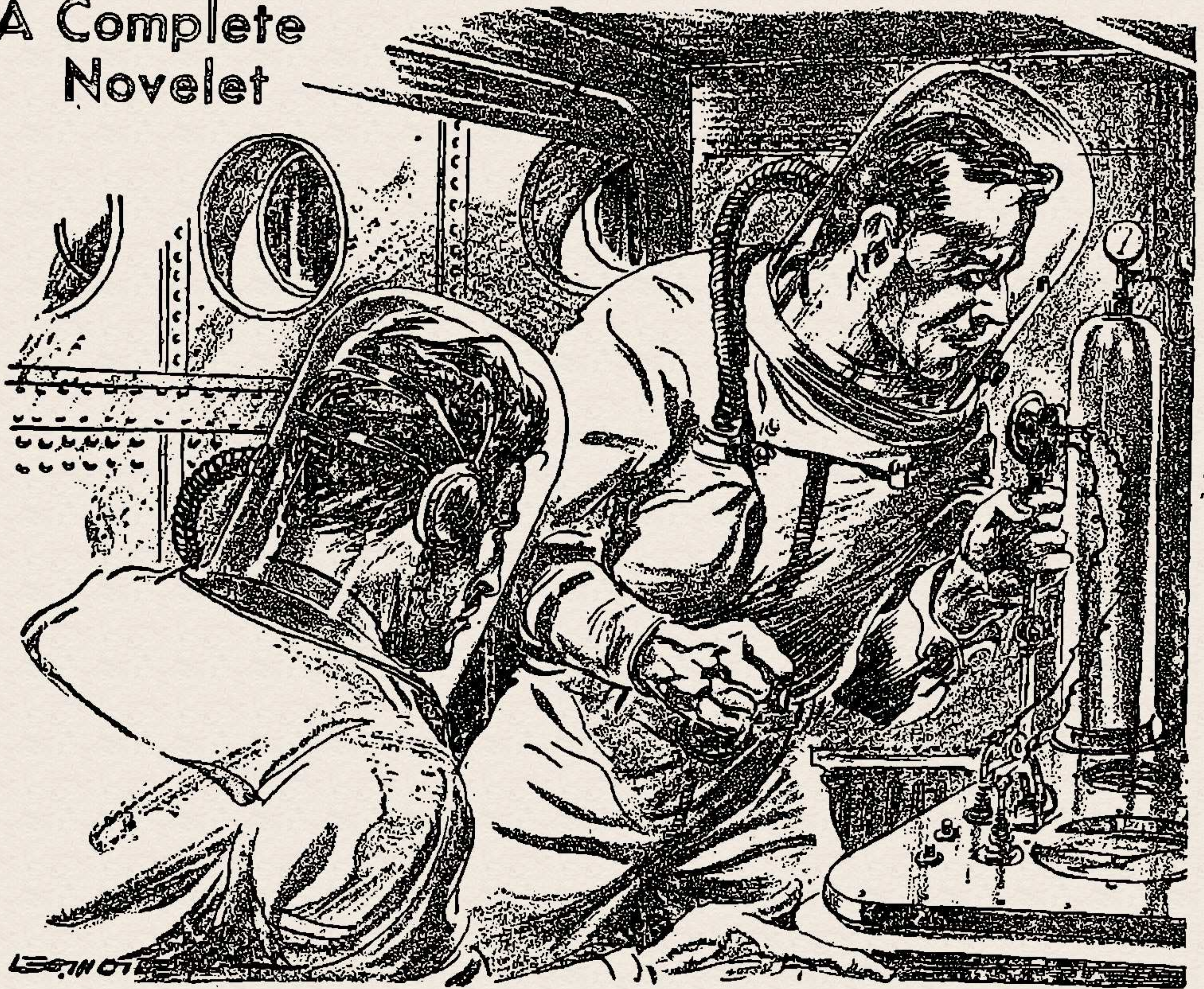
The cover painting by E. K. Bergey depicts a scene from Oscar J. Friend's short story, THE STOLEN SPECTRUM.

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A Complete Novelet



"Look, Greg Zhor!" Karragon laughed harshly. "She shall be

THE TYRANT OF

CHAPTER I

The Price of Failure

GREG ZHOR, lying flat on the rooftop, gazed over the parapet at the crowded streets below. Mercis, mighty capital of Mars, presented a brilliant, grim spectacle. The tall buildings, with their double windows for protection against the red dust storms, were plastered with pictures of Karragon, dictator of Mars. Banners bearing the Thelist symbol, the hated circle-enclosed square, hung limply in the hot, dry air.

High overhead, ominous space cruisers darkened the fierce, white-hot sky. The Gros Canal—recently re-named the Karragon Canal—cut the

city like a sharp, silver knife. Its waters were choked with canal-defense boats, the speedy crafts designed to enforce the Thelist rule upon hamlets that were too small to warrant a visit from the huge space cruisers.

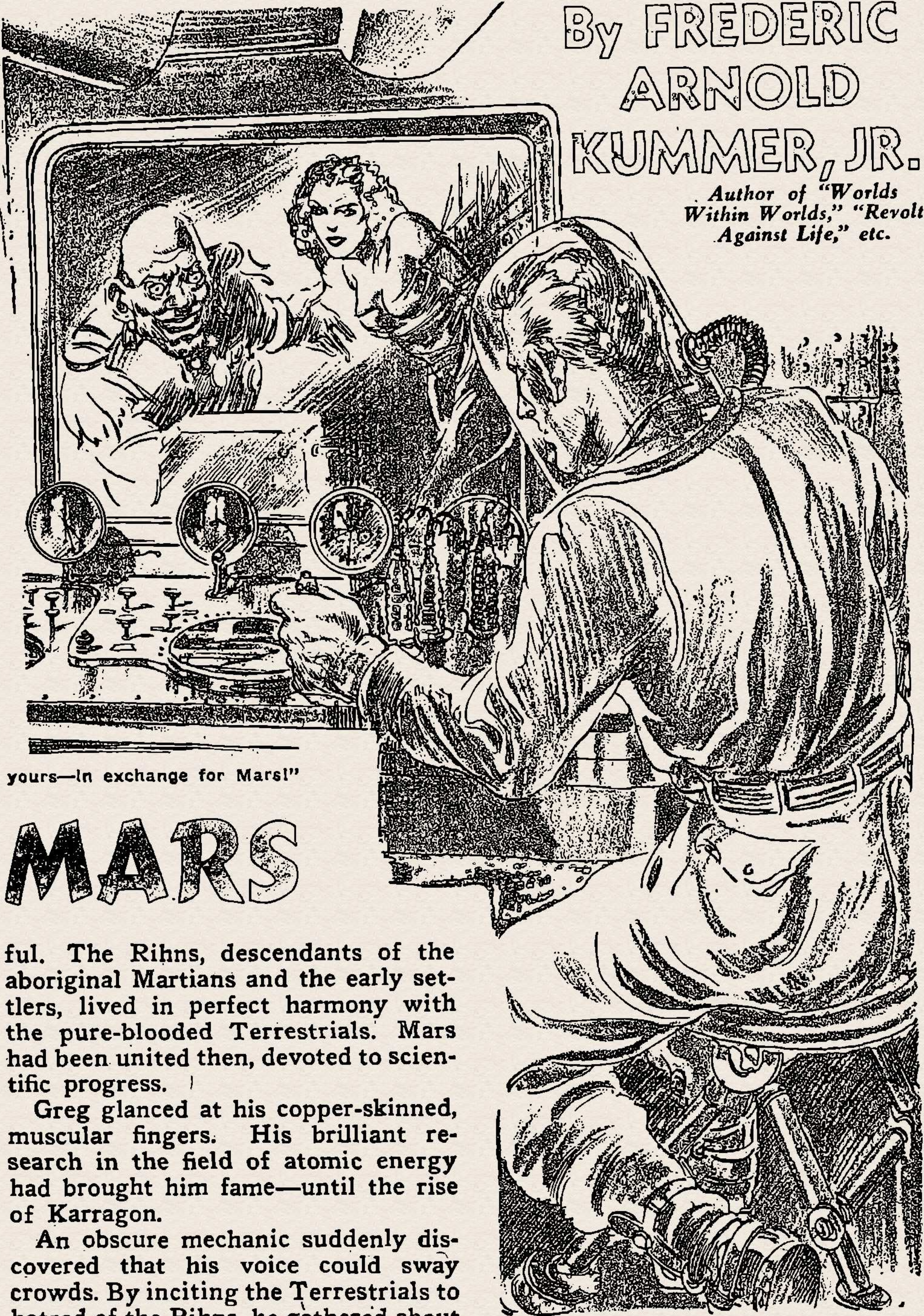
The city streets were lined with swaggering Thelist Guards, big, insolent fellows armed with heat guns and shock-sticks. Batteries of heat guns, lumbering rocket-tanks, and rows of trucks rumbled through the city, blackening the streets with the downward blasts of their rockets. All that vast show was the usual prelude to Karragon's fiery, bitter speeches.

On the rooftop, Greg stared with furious eyes at this parade of the dictator's might. Half a decade before Mars had been a republic, quiet, peace-

A Scientist's Strategy Sunders the

By **FREDERIC
ARNOLD
KUMMER, JR.**

*Author of "Worlds
Within Worlds," "Revolt
Against Life," etc.*



yours—in exchange for Mars!"

MARS

ful. The Rihns, descendants of the aboriginal Martians and the early settlers, lived in perfect harmony with the pure-blooded Terrestrials. Mars had been united then, devoted to scientific progress.

Greg glanced at his copper-skinned, muscular fingers. His brilliant research in the field of atomic energy had brought him fame—until the rise of Karragon.

An obscure mechanic suddenly discovered that his voice could sway crowds. By inciting the Terrestrials to hatred of the Rihns, he gathered about him a following of brutal rowdies, of bigoted fanatics. Now Karragon ruled by force and fear, madly building armaments for his dreams of conquest.

The Rihns, segregated from the pure

Terrestrials, were eternally persecuted. Secret police were everywhere. Greg was forced to discontinue his scientific work, made a test-tube cleaner

Shackles of a Crimson World in Bondage!

by the arrogant Thelist physicists. Joan Vail, the pure-blooded Terrestrial girl to whom he was engaged, had been forbidden to see him. Greg's life had turned from the rosy hue of his native Martian planes to the bleak darkness of outer space.

Suddenly, from the streets below, came a thunderous roar.

"Karragon! Karragon!"

The wretched Rihns were aware of the consequences of silence. They echoed the shout, their right hands raised in the Thelist salute.

IN his fantastically ornate car, the dictator looked neither to right nor left. His bullet head gleamed in the sunlight. His jutting jaw was set at a belligerent angle. But now and again he would tug at his small mustache.

In the center of the square the car stopped. Karragon stepped out, climbed to the speaker's dais. Striking a theatrical attitude, he stood smiling at the tumult of applause.

Deliberately Greg Zhor drew out a small ray gun. The dictator had begun to speak. Greg could hear the fiery words, echoing through the amplifying system.

"First, war to liquidate the enemy within. Then, a glorious war to conquer the Solar System! Enemies . . . Victory . . . Triumph . . ."

Sighting along the barrel of the ray projector, Greg laughed. Karragon was boasting of his might, his conquests to be. In another second he would be blasted into ashes! With the people of Mars free, there would be a return to peace and progress. His finger tightened about the trigger.

"Greg!" Light footsteps sounded on the roof behind him.

Greg leaped to his feet, saw a white face framed by dark ringlets, black eyes wide with fear. Then she was clinging to his arm.

"Joan!" he muttered. "What are you—"

"I learned of the plot from old Zoab. Thank God, I arrived in time!"

"To stop me?" He stared at her, incredulous. "You want to stop me after what Karragon has done to my people? After he has ruined our dreams of happiness?"

"But, Greg! It would do no good to kill Karragon! The Thelist machine has the planet in its grip. If Karragon died they would elect another to take his place. Would killing him destroy their fleets, their war machine? Would it disorganize the secret police, or repeal the harsh laws? And think what would happen to your people when it became known that a Rihn had assassinated the dictator!"

Under the force of her words, Greg's shoulders sagged.

"You're right, of course. It would only result in the persecution of my people. There's nothing we can do. Nothing!"

"No, Greg. There's a lot you can do. Set up a secret laboratory and continue your work. Discover something—something big—that will destroy the Thelist forts and ships. You will, Greg. I know you will!"

Greg straightened up. "I'll try, Joan. I'll do all I can for my people—and for you." He crushed her into his arms, kissed her.

Shouts, heavy footsteps drove them apart. A half-dozen Storm Guards poured out on the rooftop.

"By Thael!" their leader roared. "Here's insolence. Bad enough for a Terrestrial girl to be seen talking to a Rihn—but making love! A year in the mills will make you more careful with your kisses, wench. And as for you—" He broke off suddenly, noticing Greg's hand slide toward his pocket. "Watch out! Grab him!"

Storm Guards leaped forward, touched Greg with the copper tips of their staffs. Joan screamed as he writhed under the high voltage, then crumpled limply.

"Let's have a look through this rebel's pockets. By Thael, a gun! The radium mines for you, my friend. That's the penalty for a Rihn carrying a gun." The leader beckoned to one of his men. "Take the girl to Headquarters. The mills for her, and send a stretcher for this traitorous dog."

Greg, dimly conscious, heard Joan's voice calling, repeating his name. From the square below came Karragon's voice, thundering triumphantly.

"Culture and civilization which we will spread throughout the Solar Sys-

tem to form a new and glorious era—Utopia!"

* * * * *

GREG ZHOR remembered little of the next month. He was conscious of only dreamlike impressions. The brief mockery of a trial and the sentence to life imprisonment—two years—in the radium mines of Phobus.

He remembered being carried into the prison ship, landing upon the barren, rocky plain, being herded with hundreds of other prisoners into the glassite air-locks of their underground world. Indelibly stamped upon Greg's mind were the spaceport with its blackened sand pits, its freighters waiting for their cargo of radium ore—the bristling towers and administration building—the repair shops and pumping station—and beyond, the bleak terrain dropping off into a close horizon. Before them the air-lock sloped downward into the heart of the little world.

Guards clad in lead-x suits drove them forward with waves of their shock-sticks. Downward, a maze of galleries and shafts was lit only by sickly green radium lamps. One of the prisoners, a white-haired Rihn, fell to his knees, horrified by the eerie atmosphere.

A burly guard stepped forward, cracking a heavy whip. Greg stood frozen with horror as the lash thudded about the old man's shoulders. He tensed, fists clenched. Then the sight of the other keepers, shock-sticks glowing, made him realize the futility of resistance.

Sick with despair, he turned, trudged forward to escape the sobbing moans of the dying man.

Downward, ever downward. . . . The huge leaden shoes he wore as compensation for the feeble gravity of Phobus raised blisters on his feet. In spite of the vast air-locks and pumps above, the air was stale, fetid. Deathly cold slashed through his ragged garments.

Suddenly, as they rounded a corner, there came the sound of singing—the plaintive, chilling Song of the Sufferers. The song tormented Greg, tore at his heart. He could shut his eyes and imagine a dusty plain with its clumps of *fayeh* bushes filling the air

with fragrance, the lapping of the water in the canals, the restless yelp of a farm-dog. And always the song held that aching, tortured monotony of despair. Then, just as it seemed one could stand no more, the Song of the Sufferers ended. Greg shuddered, stumbled forward into the rock-hewn cell.

"Saints!" Old Zoab clutched at Greg's arm. "Will we be like them after we've been here awhile?"

Greg glanced about the large cavern. It was crowded by the new prisoners, some two hundred in number. Shivering with cold, they huddled around the roaring natural gas flame which kept the prisoners from dying of cold during their rest periods.

A strange lethargy crept over Greg. There was no escape, no hope. Two years at the most, and then radium poisoning brought eternal release. He turned toward the heat.

"Greg," Old Zoab quavered. "Will we be like the others?"

Slowly Greg's eyes came into focus. He was a Rihn, descended from the old race of Mars and the first hardy Terrestrial colonists! Suddenly Joan seemed to be standing before him. He could see her bent over the looms in the great mills at Mercis, so brave, so determined. She had believed in him. Greg Zhor straightened up, jaw set.

"No!" he stated fiercely. "No!"

The clanging of the cell's iron door whipped him around. A brutish guard, ray gun in hand, shoved a box of concentrated food tablets into the cell. Water was to be obtained from the thin stream that poured from a fissure in the rocky walls.

"Divide the tablets equally!" Greg cried. "And rest. You will need sleep."

Sheeplike, they obeyed him. He propped himself against the wall to think.

IN the weird half-light of the mines, there was no night or day. Only eating and exhausted slumber interrupted the heart-breaking toil in the shafts. Horribly distorted by radium poisoning, the older prisoners chanted the Song of the Sufferers.

Outwardly Greg and his group had

taken on the emotionless, robotlike appearance of the others. In the rest periods, however, they sat hunched about the spouting flame to whisper plans of escape. At first they were in favor of rushing the guards during the trip from the gallery to the cell. Greg and old Zoab pointed out the futility of such action. The guards, armed with ray guns, would cut them down without compunction.

"During the time for sleep," Zoab muttered, "there are only two guards patrolling the lower levels."

"And how do we get out of this iron kennel?" a prisoner growled.

"Greg Zhor will think of a way—in time," Zoab said firmly.

"In time!" the man spat disgustedly. "Better a quick death by the heat rays than have our bones rotted by radium poison. What good is science without electricity, without apparatus?"

A chorus of voices murmured. "Bar El is right," someone grunted. "Already the radium takes its toll!"

Greg stepped forward, motioning for silence.

"If I find a way to escape, will you devote your lives to the overthrow of Karragon and the freeing of Mars? I have that way of escape!"

CHAPTER II

The Crushed Can Conquer!

FOR the first time in many months, fierce hope shone in the circle of eyes.

"Follow you?" Bar El whispered hoarsely. "Let me have but one glimpse of the Sun, of the red plains of Mars. I'll follow you to hell and back!"

Greg stared at the eager faces. They counted on him so heavily. What if his experiment proved a failure, or his memory played him false? But he had to escape—for Joan. . . .

"Good," he said, with a confidence he did not feel. "By three more rest periods we shall be ready to escape. I promise it."

"Greg." Zoab touched his arm. "How is it possible? Don't tantalize them

with hopes that can not be realized."

"False hopes?" A thin smile crossed Greg's lean, dark face. "How would you go about obtaining an acid, Zoab?"

"Why"—the old man seemed puzzled—"I'd set the gauges of a Henderson Converter to the proper atomic structure and. . . ."

"True." Greg nodded. "But we have no Converter, nor the means of making one. Yet the ancients had none either, and they obtained acids."

"History," Zoab said with a trace of sarcasm. "I'm a scientist."

"So were the ancients." From a niche in the wall of the cell, Greg drew several clumsy jars, gleaming dull red. "I noticed clay stains on the clothes of Mark Victis, who works in gallery forty-four. Each day he has managed to bring back two handfuls of it. I baked these jars over the jet while you others slept."

Zoab stared at the vessels. "I do not understand."

"Look." Greg uncovered one of the jars. It was filled with a greenish crystalline substance. "Melanterite! I found it in the gallery where I work."

"Melanterite? That's mostly iron sulphate."

"Right." Greg placed a long, nozzle-like clay cap on the jar. "We shove the jar into the gas flame and immerse the end of the nozzle into this vat of water. Sulfur trioxide will pour from the nozzle and bubble up through the water, creating sulphuric acid."

"Greg!" Zoab cried. "This—this means—"

Greg Zhor watched the bubbles rising through the water.

"It means a chance for freedom!"

Three rest periods later, all was in readiness. The occupants of cell twelve, trudging back from the galleries, struggled to fight down their excitement. Greg glanced at the guards nervously, fearing that they might sense the air of suppressed activity. The Thelists, however, had no thought for anything but going off duty. After shoving the food tablets into the cells, they left only the two night guards to pace the shadowy corridor. Greg Zhor began to drip the acid into the massive iron lock. He told the others to rest, but sleep was

impossible. Grouped in a circle about the flaring gas jet, they sat frozen into tense immobility. Their eyes were fixed on Greg as he used the clay nozzle to keep the lock wet with acid. Only at the guard's approach did they sprawl on the floor in feigned slumber.

HOURS passed. Old Zoab broke the silence with a whispered question. Greg shook his head, resumed his monotonous task. A thousand fears harassed him. Was the acid too dilute? Had he been correct in his calculations? How much time still remained?

Bar El had been counting the number of times that the guard passed the cell. Now he stepped forward.

"The period has almost passed. Can't we continue tomorrow?"

"No. They would see the lock had been tampered with."

The voice of a guard calling to his companion echoed along the corridor.

"By Thael, I'm tired! The last five minutes seem like a year."

"You hear?" Bar El whispered. "Too late!"

Greg's shoulders sagged. Their one chance — and it had failed! He examined the lock. The metal, though eaten deeply by the acid, still held. When the guards opened the cell to take them to the shafts, it would be discovered. . . .

"Wait!" Zoab gripped his arm. "The lock is more than half gone! Throw your weight on the door!"

With a furious cry the prisoners hurled themselves at the iron grating. It shook but did not yield. The two sleepy guards spun around, fumbling for their heat guns.

"Once more!" Zoab cried. "Now!"

In a mad, desperate burst of energy, the Rihns crashed against the door. A sharp crack, and the weakened lock gave way. The prisoners poured into the corridor, an avenging wave of humanity.

The guards' heat guns spurted flame, cutting wide swaths in the maddened mob. The prisoners threw their heavy, leaden gravity shoes. The guards, trying in vain to dodge, were literally buried beneath the massive chunks of lead.

Greg leaped forward, snatched up one of the heat guns. In an incredibly short time the locks of the other cells had been melted. A crowd of bewildered prisoners stumbled into the corridor.

"This way!" he shouted, racing along the passageway to the surface. "Quickly!"

Blindly they followed him, running at top speed along the rocky gallery. Greg had confused impressions of distorted shadows, stentorian breathing, the patter of myriad feet. Upward, always upward. The blood pounded in his temples. His breath came in gasps.

As the fugitives rounded a corner of the passage, they suddenly halted. Not a hundred yards ahead of them was the day shift of guards, thirty of them, armed with heavy atomite rifles.

Greg raised his ray gun. Before he could fire, a blast from the rifles dropped at least three hundred of the Rihns. Greg felt a hot, searing pain along his arm. He slid instinctively to the floor beside the charred, blackened corpses of his comrades.

The remainder of the prisoners backed hastily behind the protecting angle of rock. Greg, lying motionless, watched the group of guards advance slowly, their rifles poised. One of them was adjusting his micro-wave set. If a general alarm reached the surface—

GREG raised the heat gun. A blue ball of fire from an atomite struck the wall of the cavern directly over his head. He winced as a drop of molten rock struck his shoulders. Then he squeezed the trigger. A despairing scream, a puff of smoke and the guards dropped lifeless to the floor.

"Good lad," Zoab hobbled around the corner, clutching a scorched leg. "What fools, to stay in close order!"

"Hurry!" Greg leaped forward. "The alarm may have reached the surface."

Once again the Rihns surged forward, stopping only to pick up the atomite rifles. The ascent was slower than before, since some of the wounded had to be carried. Pale light gleamed ahead. "The Sun!" Zoab cried hoarsely. The sight of it made Greg forget the pain in his arm. Now

they were in the great glassite tube leading to the spaceport. High above, Mars loomed vast and red in the sky, bathing the icy surface of Phobus in pale rose light.

So far, it seemed, no alarm had reached the little surface colony. The pumping station, the spaceport, the fortress, showed no signs of unusual activity. At the entrance to the air-lock a bewildered guard spun around. A blast from an atomite rifle cut him down before he could shout a warning.

Greg glanced ahead and his heart sank. There was only one space ship in the port. Instead of lying beside the air-lock, it rested fully a quarter of a mile away. How were they to reach it without space-suits?

"The alarm!" Bar El cried as a warning scream echoed through the tube.

"Take off your gravity shoes!" Greg snapped, pulling the release lever that opened the inner door of the air-lock.

They obeyed. He reached for the second lever.

"Hold your breath!"

The outer door swung open. Escaping air roared from the tube into the surrounding void, swept the prisoners half the distance to the ship. Free of the heavy lead gravity shoes, they were able to cover the remaining distance in a single mighty leap.

Eager hands reached up to tear-open the door. The outer door was drawn shut, the inner opened. The fugitives poured into the ship, gulping the life-giving air.

"The engines, Zoab!" Greg cried, running along the companionway toward the control room.

Beneath Mark Victis' pale, radium-rotted face one would not have recognized the bronzed young pilot who, a year before, had commanded a liner on the Jovian run. He stepped forward, glanced at the banks of instruments.

"Should have more pressure for the initial blast," he muttered. "But maybe with the low gravity—"

A blinding flash of light shot from the ramparts of the fortress. Greg felt a wave of fierce heat. The sand beside the ship melted and ran.


"Big guns," he cried, diving for the rocket release.

The rusty old freighter shuddered,

leaped skyward. Victis, at the T-bar, grinned in exultation. He spun the controls to place the thickness of the tiny satellite between the fort and the ship.

"That ought to do the trick," he chuckled. "And when they find all their air escaping through the open air-lock, they'll lose interest in us." He glanced at the three-dimensional map of the Solar System. "Where to, Chief?"

"The asteroids!"

 LD ZOAB looked like an undernourished Santa Claus as he stood before the port-hole, stroking his white beard. But there was no joviality in his blue eyes. They were anxious, alarmed.

"The asteroids."

A maze of bright spots ahead, diamond dust, stippled the velvet sky.

Greg nodded, a tight smile on his lean face.

"We're under their gravitational influence now. I shut the motors off an hour ago."

"Not much fuel to save. This old tub was used only for the run between Mars and Phobus. Even with the emergency tanks we'll be lucky to avoid a crash when we try to land."

"We've come this far by doing the impossible," Greg said. "We've escaped from the mines, eluded Karra-gon's space fleet. Nothing's going to stop us now. This supply ship is loaded with food capsules. If we can find some secluded little world and buckle down to work on that re-creation theory—"

He broke off as Victis' voice echoed through the communication system.

"Greg, come up to the control room at once. Hurry!"

Greg ran along the corridor toward the control room, followed by Zoab. Bar El and Victis were staring through the observation port directly below.

"Look!" Bar El ordered. Below the ship was a round, glittering sphere, a tiny asteroid not much bigger than Phobus.

"Drifting without motors enabled its gravitational field to attract us," Victis said. "Spectroscopic observa-

tions show no atmosphere and a surface composed mainly of magnesium oxide. To avoid this little world would take all of our remaining fuel. We would be unable to land on any other asteroid."

"So we have no choice but to land here?"

"Right."

Zoab's gnarled hands worked convulsively. "A barren world without air or water. I am old and death does not matter. But you, Greg, with such great ideas to give to humanity! And those poor lads below, happy over their escape." The old man bowed his head.

"Nearly time to cut the rockets," Greg said unemotionally. "Bar El, tell the others we are going to land."

CHAPTER III

Death and Rebirth

THE pallid plain rushed up to meet them. At a thousand feet Victis snapped on the forward rockets. Greg watched the roaring jets of flame churn up the magnesium oxide, blacken it. The ship sank easily toward the ground.

Abruptly the rocket blasts fizzled away to a feeble sputter. Greg had only time to press the general alarm button before the sickening crash.

He climbed dazedly to his feet. Victis was sitting on the floor, caressing a lump on his head. Zoab, clinging helplessly to the rocket acceleration handle, stared helplessly about.

"Fuel was lower than I thought," Victis grunted, snapping on the communication set. "All right below?"

"Only minor injuries," a voice replied. "But the stern plates have buckled. Our air-purifying system is completely wrecked. And our air supply is leaking out!"

"Isolate the rear compartments," Greg snapped. "Close all bulkheads."

The main cargo hold was strangely silent as Greg and his companions entered. The refugees stood grouped about the freight lift. The weeks of flight in the space ship had wrought

miracles in their appearance. Rest, food, and treatment for the terrible radium poisoning had given the ragged prisoners new strength, new life. They grinned a greeting at Greg.

"Not much I can say," Greg stated. "Too bad things have to end like this when we were so close to escape."

"End?" a man retorted. "We've air enough here for eight hours. That white world outside may contain well, anything."

"How about an exploring party?" Victis asked.

"Why not?" Bar El rumbled. "One man in a space-suit. There're only ten suits aboard. Give me one of them and I'll have a look."

Victis shook his head. "Not you. Let Zhor go. He's the scientist. He'll recognize valuable elements if he sees them. Perhaps something to make air—or fuel for the rockets."

Greg straightened his shoulders. It was futile to talk of making air, but he could not quit. Besides, who could tell what this strange little world might contain? With a nod to his companions he slid his lean, muscular frame into the heavy space-suit, stepped through the air-lock. White, level plains of magnesium oxide stretched on all sides to the close horizon. As he stepped from the shadow of the ship, he found the sun's rays mildly warming. His feet sank deeply into the loose dust. Clouds of it, stirred up by his long stride, fell slowly under the light pull of the asteroid's gravity. With one backward glance at the wrecked freighter, he set off across the plain.

He had not been gone three-quarters of an hour before he found himself completely lost. The unvarying expanse of white dust was entirely without landmarks, and the close horizon made it impossible to see the stranded ship from a distance. He thought of back-tracking along his own footprints. The fine soil had settled levelly into place.

As the short day merged into night, Greg's overwrought nerves cracked. Sense of direction completely gone, he ran in circles, panting, frightened. Always he saw the same monotonous vista of level white.

Within a few short hours the night turned into day. Delirium gripped the young scientist. His mouth was dry, parched. Joan, slim and lovely, danced in front of him, holding cups of limpid water before his feverish eyes. Karragon, mocking, gripped a white-hot lash in his hairy hand.

Greg screamed, filling the helmet with noise. A dozen times he thought he saw the wrecked freighter. The oxygen tank on his shoulders was almost empty. And the others on the ship—were they alive? Had they given up hope of his return?

Suddenly there appeared distorted faces. Wretched Rihns, ground under the Thelist rule, begging for help. Joan—Karragon—oxygen.

Greg stumbled forward through the white dust. There was the ship, and his companions, without space-suits, standing about the stern. Another mirage. He groaned and everything went black.

WHEN Greg came to, he was lying face downward on the white dust. His head, free of his helmet, was hanging over a rocky fissure. Greg took a deep breath. Air, heavy, but cool and life-giving.

"Ah!" Zoab's voice seemed miles away. "Good lad. I was afraid."

Greg shook himself, climbed dizzily to his knees.

"Careful," Victis warned. "Not too far from the edge of the crack. The air expands quickly."

Greg looked about. They were under the crumpled stern of the space ship. From within it came the faint sound of hammers ringing on metal.

"I don't understand. The mirages—and I fainted."

Zoab tugged at his beard, smiling.

"Luck," he said. "Pure luck. We might have died in the ship for lack of air while this natural well lay outside. While you were gone, Victis and I decided to put on suits and take a quick look at the damage. We thought we might be able to make repairs. As we passed this spot, I noticed dust rising in little puffs as though something below were pushing it up. Victis and I scooped away the oxide and discovered this crack in the underlying rock.

It's not the type of air to which we have been accustomed, of course. But it contains sufficient oxygen for human life. There must be a pocket of it below us, like natural gas wells on the planet Earth. The impact of our crash opened it. We should also be able to condense moisture from it."

"The others are fixing the old air tanks to enable us to pipe air into the ship," Victis said. "Zoab and I were just going out to look for you when we saw you stumbling toward us. Find anything?"

Greg nodded, leaned forward to let the cool air fan his cheeks.

"Reprieve," he declared.

A new spirit gripped the little group of castaways. The fissure gave ample air. Zoab, true to his prediction, was able to condense water from it. As for food, the cargo of concentrated tablets would last them a year or more. They were able to live, but any accomplishment was checked by a lack of power.

The irony of the situation appalled Zoab. For months they had worked in the mines, surrounded by radium. Now, for lack of a single gram of the substance to power their motors, they were marooned on this bleak asteroid. Eventually their food would be exhausted—

HOPE, however, was not abandoned. The long range audiovisor was repaired. Some undiscovered source of energy might enable them to contact friendly powers on Earth, who might be induced to brave Karragon's wrath by rescuing them. Exploring parties laboriously sank shafts into the rocky substrata, seeking something—anything—that might be used to generate power.

Zoab and Bar El worked tirelessly to find some means of utilizing the ammunition for the ray and atomite guns to run the audiovisor. Victis tinkered with a model solar energy unit. The little asteroid's swift revolutions, from day's warmth to night's biting cold, made his efforts useless.

During these long months Greg Zhor remained in his cabin, laboring over masses of paper. Those half-formed plans which had constantly

crossed his mind while in prison were taking shape on paper.

Re-creation—in the beginning, a weapon to defeat Karragon. In the end—who could say? Its variations were endless. Re-creation was merely the reverse of a process which is old as time.

Greg picked up his pencil, plunged once more into the maze of intricate calculations. Zoab entered the cabin noiselessly.

"I have brought you food."

"Food? Ah, yes. You have brought me food many times during these long months, haven't you, Zoab? And talked to me, too, although I'm afraid I haven't listened. But today, old friend, I shall listen. It is finished. Another hour or so of detail, perhaps, and re-creation is no longer a dream. It is here, a reality, waiting only to be transformed into metal. How are the others?"

"We are all well," the old man replied. "But—"

"Good." Greg stood up, smiling. "We have a big job ahead, building the re-creator. You have discovered some source of power, of course. I shall need tremendous energy to supply the spectro-tubes."

For a long moment Zoab did not answer. Then, silently, he shook his head.

Greg's face went white. He clutched the edge of the table, stared at Zoab.

"No power? Solar energy, radium, even such primitive sources as coal or oil?"

"Nothing. Magnesium oxide and rock, nothing more. We have used the rifles and heat rays to sink a shaft down thousands of feet but—only rock."

Greg gazed at the mass of papers on the desk. All the life, the vitality seemed drained out of him. He laughed bitterly.

"The greatest invention of the Universe, never to leave this barren mass of rock! All my efforts, hopes. . ."

He fell back into the chair, buried his face in his hands. Zoab laid a kindly hand upon his shoulder.

"They're still digging," he said. "Perhaps, deeper—"

A clanging of feet in the iron corridor interrupted him. Bar El, his face covered with an air mask, burst into the room.

"Explosion in the shaft! Hensic was killed!"

GREG and Zoab ran into the control room, peered through the observation port. A short distance from the bow of the freighter were the great piles of rubble which had been taken from the shaft. A hundred figures stood beside the ship, staring in awed wonder.

A vast blue column towered high above the shaft. The blue color, Greg noticed, was more pronounced at the base of the column, growing fainter and fainter until it disappeared entirely at the top.

"What is it?" Zoab whispered.

"I don't know," Bar El growled. "We were digging at the bottom of the shaft. Suddenly there was a rumble and this blue stuff shot us out of the pit and into the air. Hensic must've scraped against the wall of the shaft while we were being hurled upward. He was ripped to shreds. I was tossed up as high as the top of the geyser but the light gravity and the soft magnesium dust broke my fall. Damn near froze, though." He shivered, blew upon his fingers.

"Froze?" Zoab exclaimed, his voice shrill with excitement. "It must be liquid air! That accounts for the blue color and the fact that it disappears instead of falling back to the ground. The air from that fissure must be from the same source, only in seeping upward slowly, it has time to vaporize. When this asteroid was in a formative state, centrifugal force hurled the molten rock to the surface. It cooled and contracted, subjecting the air to tremendous pressure. A most interesting phenomenon."

"Interesting?" Greg whirled about, his eyes blazing. "It's power! Power!"

The days that followed were an endless struggle with crude tools and the rapidly diminishing power of the heat rays. The rocket recoil block, a vast piece of ferro-carbon, was taken from the wrecked stern of the freighter.

Aided by the light gravitational pull, they were able to drag it over the mouth of the shaft, effectively capping the gusher of liquid air. The empty fuel tanks, set up nearby, were converted into huge turbines. Under Greg's skilful direction, a large generator was built.

Swiftly the old freighter dwindled as the power plant grew. The resourceful genius of Zoab created transformers from the remains of the air-conditioning unit, and even serviceable storage batteries from odds and ends of the lighting system. Crude methods, forgotten for centuries, were utilized by Greg in his plans for the creation of power.

At last, after weeks of unremitting toil, the power plant was completed. A pipe, running through the center of the rocket recoil block, led to the turbines, while a series of cogs were arranged to turn the generator at a high rate of speed.

Greg, after a last-minute inspection, signaled Victis to begin the trial. The ex-pilot opened a release valve and a stream of air hissed into the turbines, turning them slightly. Greg bent forward, frowning. As the vaporized air passed off, liquid air shot into the turbines, expanding rapidly under the Sun-warmed metal. Wheels turned, faster and faster, until the great dynamos hummed.

"Greg!" Zoab shouted. "We've done it! We have power!"

CHAPTER IV

Power of the Weak

NOW that a source of electrical energy was assured, Greg threw himself into the construction of the re-creator. This was work of a different nature from the job just completed. Delicacy, the skill of a watchmaker, were necessary to assemble the fragile machine.

This shocked the others. They had expected huge columns, fantastic wheels, hissing pistons—something awe-inspiring, to justify Greg's predictions of its astounding powers.

But the machine was built in two separate parts, both connected with the power plant by high-tension wires. One unit, the selector, consisted of a large keyboard with nearly a hundred keys. Behind this control panel were banks of tubes made of glassite taken from the observation ports.

At each end of the set, tall condensers, capped by copper balls, pointed skyward. From the center of the unit, a thin copper rod arose. Surmounted by a glistening helix, at the touch of a control, it swung in any direction desired by the operator. Beneath the keyboard of the selector was a maze of wires enclosed by non-conductive crystalloid screens.

The second unit of the re-creator, the power projector, was almost a duplicate of the selector. The one difference was that instead of keys it held only a series of dials and gauges.

As the two units took shape, Greg lived an agony of suspense. What if his calculations were incorrect? Suppose the roughly made parts refused to function with the precision so necessary to success? And lacking platinum, he had been forced to make the atomic shield of lead.

At one point in the work, the whole machine seemed doomed to failure for want of enough gold to make the hair-like filament of the spectro-tube. Bar El's wide grin, however, revealed a gold molar that was more than enough to meet the requirements.

Using Greg's plans, the men toiled blindly over the tiny machinery without the slightest knowledge of their use. Accustomed to rough physical labor, they found this almost microscopic work maddening. Time and again Greg was forced to halt the assembly of the machines to return some little piece to its maker for more accurate fitting.

Months elapsed before the two units were finally completed.

Old Zoab threw down his file, straightened up.

"Here's the last connection, Greg. Now maybe you'll give us some idea of what this is all about."

Greg slipped the bit of crystalloid into place, tightened a screw.

"Right. The fact that the Sun is

losing weight at a rate of a quarter-billion tons per minute in the form of radiated photons indicates that energy has mass. This mass, however, is very small. For instance, the energy used by a man in a lifetime of toil has a mass of only a sixty-thousandth part of an ounce. If one were to attempt the conversion of energy into matter, the amounts obtained would be infinitesimal in comparison to the energy used. Obviously the energy released by the breakdown of a single atom would be sufficient to create only one similar atom, discounting any frictional losses."

Greg touched a switch on the projector unit, watched the tubes glow.

"Since matter is the most compact form of energy, we use matter as a source of power." He opened a glass-ite door in the projector, placed within it a lump of rock as large as his fist. "A blast of electricity passes through lead-x screens. That starts the breakdown of the protons and electrons of the rock into photons of pure energy."

HE touched a button and a blue spark leaped between the two condensers. At once a ray of pale light shot from the small end of the helix and the piece of rock began to dwindle in size.

"The ray coming from the helix is a beam of photons—energy. Their wave-length is twenty-eight octaves higher than ultra-violet light and they are capable of passing through several yards of lead. In spite of this, they are harmless, like the Sun's rays."

Greg thrust his hand into the ray of

light, withdrew it unharmed. He walked over to the other unit of the re-creator.

"This is the selector. It requires only a small voltage from the turbines. Each key represents an element. The one I am pressing is marked Au, or gold."

The others watched with breathless interest. A beam of greenish light shot from the helix atop the selector.

"So far you have seen nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps some of you have witnessed the breakdown of matter into uncontrollable energy in the laboratories at Mercis. That energy can't be made to turn wheels or propel ships. The beam of the selector is equally innocuous. But watch!"

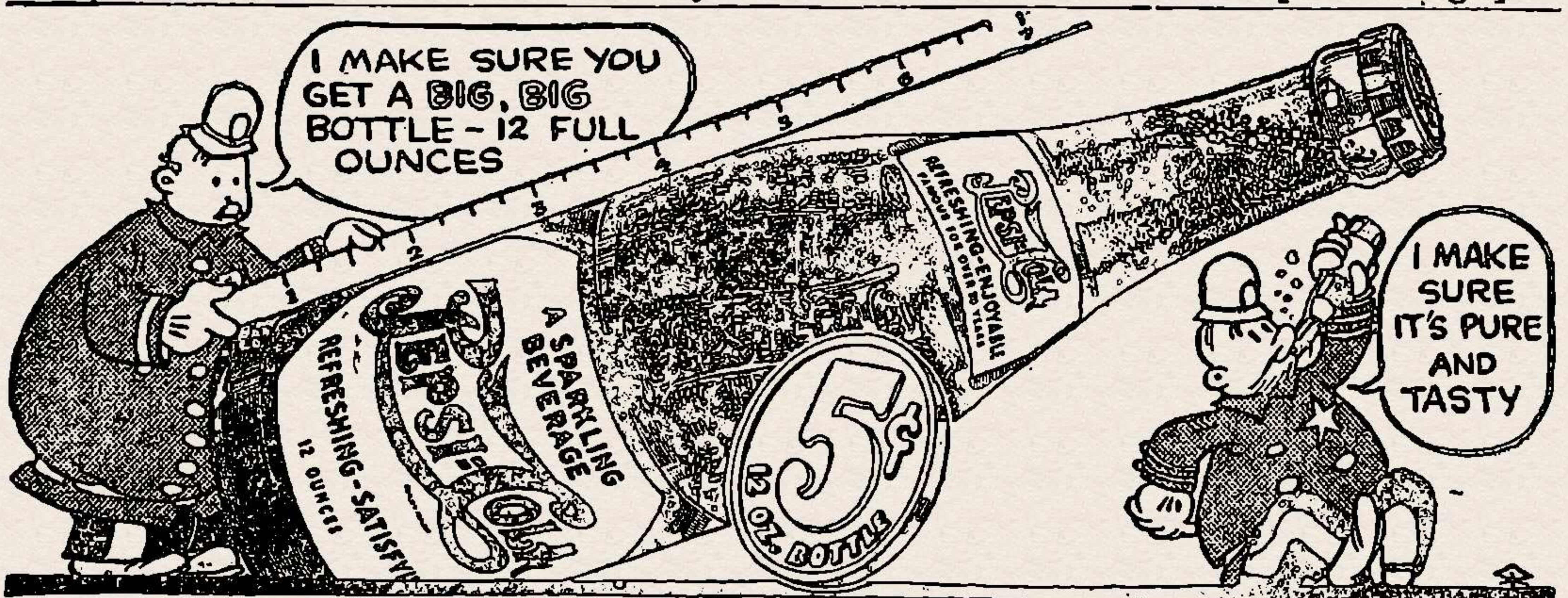
He swung the helix of the selector until it intersected the ray of photons. At the point of meeting both beams ceased. An aura of rosy light sprang into being. Suddenly, in the center of the glow, a small dark object appeared, growing larger with each moment. The piece of rock in the projector disappeared and the energy beam died away. Greg snapped off the selector ray, pointed to the spot on the floor where the two beams had crossed. There, bright against the dull steel, lay a gleaming lump of gold!

Zoab ran forward to examine the glittering bit of metal.

"It . . . it's incredible! Atomic energy released, re-created into any element desired. No more laboring in mines for radium, no more combing the Solar System for *ixite*. This is the re-creation of human happiness!"

Bar El stepped forward, his face

[Turn Page]



twisted in a puzzled frown.

"A splendid invention, yes. But how will it help us overcome Karragon, free our people?"

"You'll see." Greg turned to the audiovisor screen, spun the dials. "Asteroids calling Karragon, Dictator of Mars! Calling Karragon, Dictator of Mars!"

A moment later a man's face appeared on the screen, a thin, vapid face with a scraggly mustache in weak imitation of the dictator's.

"Central switchboard at Ducal Palace of Mars," he announced superciliously. "What is your message for his Excellency?"

"It's for Karragon alone to hear," Greg snapped. "Tell him that Greg Zhor, leader of the escaped Phobian miners, wishes to speak to him."

"What?" the man gasped. "Wait!" He turned aside, spoke deferentially into a communication tube. When he faced the screen once more, his expression was grave. "His Excellency will speak to you. Keep your dial setting unchanged."

The fugitives saw the man reach for the relay switch, then fade out. On the screen appeared the ancient throne of Mars, glittering with *thorene*, with luminous *ixite*. Seated upon it was Karragon, gnawing at his mustache, gripping the age-old Martial scepter like a mace. His shaven head glistened in the brilliant illumination. His face was convulsed with rage.

"So," he growled. "You have decided at last to throw yourselves upon my mercy—"

"Mercy?" Greg snorted. "We are already familiar with your mercy." Mockingly he gave his exact position to the last decimal. "Come and take us, Butcher—if you dare!"

"By Thael!" Karragon surged upright, his eyes blazing. "Ho, Beltan, Persis! Contact Cruiser Squadron Twenty-three. Kill on sight—"

Greg shut off the audiovisor.

"You will soon have an opportunity, Bar El, to see what our re-creator can do," he said grimly. "Come, Zoab, we have work ahead."

It was a week before the three space cruisers appeared, tiny dots against the dark sky. Greg watching the flare

of their rocket blasts, smiled narrowly.

"Take up your positions. At once!"

Hastily donning space-suits and oxygen masks, the band of Rihns abandoned the stripped freighter and crossed the white plain. Some hundred yards from the ship, Bar El and Victis were putting the finishing touches on the place of concealment which Greg had planned. This was no more than a shallow pit large enough to contain the entire party and the two units of the re-creator. It was covered by a large metal bulkhead from the ship, which in turn was thickly covered with magnesium oxide. The wires, running from the turbines to the pit, were likewise concealed.

WHEN the men entered and the white trap-door was shut, only the tiny periscopic tube projected an inch or so above the plain. His eye to the view-plate, Greg watched the Thelists cruisers swoop down upon the little asteroid. "You are sure your rays can penetrate the metal covering of this pit?" Zoab demanded.

"Through a hundred such coverings," Greg replied confidently. "Now remember, Zoab, wait until they land. We must have the ships intact." He touched a small metal box from which wires led to each of the two units. "With this automatic angle control I will be able to handle both selector and projector, synchronizing their movement so that the beams intersect at the exact point desired."

He picked up a lump of lead a foot square, placed it in the projector. Bar El shook his head incredulously.

"That little lump of lead is to destroy a space ship?" he grunted. "How?"

"You'll see," Greg glanced at the view-plate of the periscope, turned excitedly. "They're landing!"

As lightly as a leaf, the first cruiser had dropped to the surface of the asteroid. Greg tugged at a lever, adjusted delicate dials. Suddenly the machines blazed with light, and the piece of lead dwindled like ice on a hot stove. In the blinding sunlight outside, the twin rays of the re-creator were invisible. There was no sign of life from the first cruiser.

Greg placed another lump of lead in

the projector, watched the second space ship settled down on its column of rocket blasts. As he adjusted his dials, he saw the great heat guns of the ship being cleared for action. Sound amplifiers appeared on the control deck. A voice, faint in the thin air, echoed across the plain.

"Fugitives from Phobus, you are at our mercy! We give you thirty seconds to come out of your ship and surrender. If you are—" With a gasping moan, the voice trailed off into silence.

"More lead, quickly!"

Greg reset the dials. Bar El, his eyes wide with wonder, placed another cake of lead in the projector.

The third cruiser had landed beside its silent sister ships. It exhibited signs of sudden panic. Dazzling heat rays lashed out from its bow, focused on the wrecked freighter. The old vessel turned cherry-red, fell apart like a cardboard box in water. Just as the metal started to melt, the rays of the cruiser winked out.

"Finis!" Greg whispered, closing the main switch. "Lucky they didn't ray the turbines before the ship."

"You . . . you mean they're all dead?" Victis demanded.

"Come and see," Greg said somberly.

THEY followed him from the dug-out, across the dusty plain. Ahead of them three space ships lay devoid of life.

"Tombs," Zoab muttered. "Giant tombs."

The ground beneath their feet was still hot from the blasts of the cruiser's rockets. Greg stepped up to the first of the great gleaming cylinders, opened the thick outer door of the air-lock.

"Keep your space-suits on," he warned, entering the compartment.

The light inner door of the air-lock was barred, but yielded easily to a blast from the heat ray. Greg kicked open the red-hot door, entered. Through a cloud of opaque greenish vapor, the Rihns could see the bodies of the crew lying upon the floor. Their blackened faces were contorted in agony, their hands clutching at their throats.

"God!" Bar El gasped, horror-

struck. "What—"

"An ancient weapon," Greg replied. "One thought to be outmoded centuries ago. Fluorine gas."

"Gas?" Bar El still did not understand. "That little lump of lead?"

Greg nodded. "Broken into energy and re-created in the interior of this ship as gas. Gas equal in weight to that little lump of lead is enough to asphyxiate a city. The three cruisers are ours—intact."

With the capture of the enemy warships, another period of work awaited the refugees. Each of the vessels had to be outfitted with re-creators, prepared for the attack on Mars. The splendid equipment they contained made this far easier than the building of the first set. Greg directed the work in a fever of excitement.

They had come so far since they had escaped the radium mines with only courage and knowledge to aid them. Now, after countless disappointments, endless labors, they had three magnificent space cruisers, fueled with tons of radium. Three ships against Karragon's mighty armada, yet with the re-creator. . .

Greg thought of his people, the Rihns, wretched, despised, cruelly enslaved. And Joan—Joan whose hair was a cloud of darkness, whose eyes were pools of night. His hand shook at the memory of her. Had the toil in the mills at Mercis robbed her of that dark, vivid beauty? Had she clung to her faith in him in spite of everything? He spurred himself on to redoubled efforts, working until he seemed to be living a strange, distorted dream through which his companions moved like grey ghosts.

In two weeks the ships were armed with re-creation units. Greg took command of one, Victis another, and Zoab, the third.

As they climbed aboard, Greg cast a last look at the little world which had for so many months been their home. The pallid plain, the fused remains of the wrecked freighter, the massive air turbines. Struck by a sudden thought, Greg picked up an atomite rifle, leveled it at the block of ferro-carbon which capped the gusher of liquid air. A dazzling ball of fire

split the heavy block and once again the blue column jetted skyward.

Bar El, squeezing his massive bulk through the air-lock door, nodded in approval. An atmosphere meant moisture, rain. Perhaps some day when the magnesium had been swept into crevices, the rock beneath might rot into rich soil.

In the control room Greg took a deep breath, pulled the rocket acceleration lever toward him. A moment later the three ships were hurtling through the void toward Mars.

CHAPTER V

All for Freedom!

WHEN they were still millions of miles away from Mars, Greg saw the Martian fleet streaking toward him. Half an hour and he would be within range of their heat guns.

He made rapid calculations, pressed the key of the selector marked H. From the nose of the cruiser twin rays shot forth, to be followed a moment later by rays from his other two ships. As the Thelist fleet drew near, it presented easier targets. Since the speed of its approach was constant, Greg found it easy to contract the angle of the twin beams so they met at the correct point. Although the Rihn gun crews were kept busy supplying the hungry re-creators with blocks of radium, the Martian armada seemed to disregard their efforts.

"Huh?" Bar El frowned at the approaching fleet. "D'you suppose we've gassed them all and the ships continue with locked controls?"

As if in answer to his query, a light glowed on the audiovisor. Greg spun the dials. A fat, cruel face, encased in a glassite space helmet, appeared on the screen.

"Greg Zhor." The man's voice was muffled by his helmet. "The commander of our squadron, which you captured, gasped one word into the audiovisor when he died. 'Gas!' We come prepared in our space-suits. Our pressure indicators show that you have in some way released gas in these

ships, but we are unharmed. Within five minutes you will be in range of our heat rays. Surrender, or we blast you from the skies!"

Greg turned contemptuously from the screen.

"Shut off that fool, Bar El," he snapped. "Signal Zoab and Victis to proceed according to instructions."

Bending over the keyboard of the selector, he pressed the key marked Pt. All at once the leading ship of the enemy fleet seemed to stagger. With a blast of yellow flame it burst into a thousand fragments! Greg shifted the rays to another ship. It, too, was rent by a mighty explosion.

Zoab and Victis were in action now, and the darkness of space was lit by flaring, shattering explosions. In spite of the terrible havoc, the remaining Thelist ships plunged forward with appalling bravery. Their heat rays licked out at extreme range. Before they could do more than fuse a few outer plates, the mighty unknown force tore them into twisted scraps of metal. In ten short minutes the vaunted Martian fleet, pride of the war-lord Karragon, had been ripped to bits! Bar El stared out of the observation port, awe-struck.

"Greg!" he whispered. "How—"

Greg spun the rocket control to avoid the crumpled hulk of a once-powerful cruiser.

"Gas. I created hydrogen in the ships and the gas, of course, mingled with the oxygen already present. Then I pressed the key which causes the photons to reform in the structure of platinum. A bit of platinum no larger than a marble was sufficient. Its surface absorbs hydrogen. Acting as a catalyst, it brings about a union of the two gases. That union blasted open the ships."

Greg turned to the audiovisor, tuned it to general broadcasting wavelength.

"Escaped Phobian miners calling the Rihns of Mars! We have this day destroyed the Thelist fleet and are proceeding at once to Mars. After five years of persecution and tyranny, a new era of peace and liberty is dawning. Now is the time to strike. Men of Mars, join us in our battle."

BENEATH the space ships, Mars lay like a vast pomegranate, filling the entire sky. Now they were past Deimos with its gay winter sports resorts, past hated Phobus.

"Ah," Bar El rumbled. "I can almost smell the *fayeh* blossoms, hear the water gurgling through the canals. Home, lad! The little taverns with their bottles of sparkling *teka*, their fire-eyed dancing girls. Have you seen them dance within a circle of scarred, space-bitten faces? The jostling of crowds, the clamoring voices, the dry, dusty smell of the air!" He gripped the T-bar tightly. "Mercis!"

Greg, standing motionless beside him, was also thinking of home. To him it meant Joan. It was so long since he had seen her. Now only the land forces of Karragon prevented him from being with her. But those land forces might prove the most formidable of all the barriers he had so far encountered. The great ray batteries, the rumbling tanks, the massive forts. . .

As the ships drew nearer the surface, the returning Rihns were gripped with a fever of anxiety. Mercis lay strangely quiet, the calm before the storm. In another moment the air would be rent with a hell of heat rays and atomite blasts. To return the fire meant the slaughter of their own people. Now they were able to pick out the crystalloid dome of the Hall of Learning, the Gros Canal, alive with boats, the gleaming solex cupola of the citadels.

Suddenly the indicator of the audiovisor glowed. Turning the dials, Greg saw a man's face appear on the screen. A Rihn, his head bound, but his eyes glowed with triumph.

"Heroes of space!" he cried. "Mars is yours. The message you sent two days ago has inspired our people to rise, to conquer. For months we have been planning a drive for freedom, secretly manufacturing weapons, organizing our forces. The Thelists were frightened by the loss of their fleet. They offered only feeble resistance. Except for the great fortress on the plains of Psidis, we have been everywhere victorious. The people of Mars wait to acclaim you!"

"And Karragon?" Greg demanded.

The man's face clouded. "Karragon alone holds the Psidis fortress. And we dare not fire upon him because—" He hesitated.

"Well?" Greg grated. "Out with it!"

"Because he has taken Joan Vail as a hostage to insure his safety."

For a long moment Greg stared unseeingly at the audiovisor. Joan in the hands of Karragon! What horrors would the sadistic dictator perpetrate to avenge himself upon the man who had blasted his plans?

Greg's face was pale, drawn, as he spun the audiovisor dials, contacted the other two ships. Old Zoab was tenderly sympathetic, Victis blazing with anger. Greg nodded dully in response to their words.

"We proceed at once to Psidis," he muttered mechanically.

IN a few minutes the three space ships were hovering above that drab red plain.

"Karragon!" Greg turned to the audiovisor once more. "Karragon, Madman of Mars!"

"Ah, Zhor." The dictator's oily voice echoed through the control room. "I have been expecting you. Allow me to show you something which I know will interest you."

Figures took shape on the screen. Greg could see the interior of the fort, a small room lined with levers, dials, instruments. From that room, one man could control the giant engines of destruction that lay below.

Seated upon a small stool was Karragon, adjusting the connections of a square metal box, like a twentieth century camera. On the other side of the room, lashed to a metal framework, was Joan Vail.

"Look, Greg Zhors!" Karragon laughed harshly. "Lovely, isn't she? Worthy of a queen's ransom. She shall be yours—in exchange for Mars!"

"Mars is not mine to give."

"But the weapon with which you so easily destroyed my space fleet? With it I could conquer Mars . . . the entire Solar System!" A wild light gleamed in Karragon's eyes. "Let me have the secret of the weapon, Greg

Zhor. I will give you this woman!"

"No!" Joan's voice was strong with courage. "Greg, you can't!"

High above in the space cruiser, Greg stared at the screen with tortured eyes. He had fought against overwhelming odds. He had driven himself remorselessly. He devoted his whole existence to the freeing of the woman he loved— Now, in his hour of triumph, he must forfeit her life for the future of humanity!

"You are thinking, no doubt, of refusing my offer," Karragon observed sardonically. "Perhaps in a few minutes you may change your mind. Have you noticed this little metal box beside me? It emanates a vibratory wave of the same length as the electrical impulses of the human nervous system. In a mild form it causes every nerve to tingle pleasantly. This projector, however, is powered up to a million volts.

"If you were to prick your finger with a white-hot needle, it would hurt. Can you conceive of every nerve of the human body being touched by white-hot needles along every inch of its length? The pain is unbelievable. More, since it does no physical damage to the subject, he—or she—may live for days. Of course the pain drives our subject mad, but that doesn't stop the agony. Let me demonstrate the effect of a mere hundred thousand volts."

As he spoke, Karragon touched a lever. A beam of violet light shot from the metal box, suffusing the girl's slim figure. For an instant her body tensed, surging forward against her bonds until the ropes bit into the soft flesh. A shrill, agonized scream burst from her lips.

"A very satisfactory demonstration," Karragon chuckled. "We will now try five hundred thousand volts. Observe closely, Greg Zhor."

HIS spatulate fingers moved the lever another notch. Joan's face was a distorted mask. Her body twitched, her eyes reflected the horrible suffering that racked every nerve.

"Greg!" she moaned. "Greg! I can't stand it!"

"The next notch will be a full mil-

lion volts," Karragon said smoothly. "But perhaps you will reconsider my offer before I provide the ultimate test."

Standing in front of the cruiser's audiovisor, Greg was frozen with speechless horror. One thought alone kept pounding through his brain. Better to kill her than permit such torture. He reached for the switch of the re-creator. Fluorine.

And then suddenly on the screen he saw it, a thin wall of iron rising from the floor, cutting Joan off from the pain projector.

"Greg!" It was Zoab's voice on the intra-ship micro-wave. "The re-creator!"

A flash of understanding swept over Greg. With frenzied haste he pressed the key of the selector marked Fe. Into the maw of the recreator Bar El thrust block after block of the radium, shouting to the others to bring more fuel from the bins. With the three ships working in unison, the wall rose with incredible rapidity. Now only Joan's head and shoulders were exposed. Karragon, watching the wall appear as if by magic, stumbled backward in abject terror, sending the pain projector crashing to the floor.

With Joan completely shielded, another wall began to appear in front of Karragon, pinning him in a small corner of the room. Livid with fear, the dictator drew his heat gun, blasted at the growing wall. It melted under the ray. But the molten metal, trickling toward him, forced Karragon back against the side of the fort.

Inexorably a third wall began to rise a few inches from him, sealing him in a gray prison. Being only a few feet wide, it rose more rapidly than the others. Backed in his corner, Karragon was a weak, palsied figure.

In the space ship high above, Greg moved the twin beams back and forth, a grim smile on his lips. Through the audiovisor he could see the rising iron wall, the dictator's panic-stricken face. Karragon was helpless. To use his heat ray on an object so close would mean burning himself to a crisp. He was captured. They would drag him back to Mercis for a trial that could have only one outcome. The wall was

waist-high now. In another moment. . . .

With the frenzy of despair Karra-gon leaped forward, seeking to vault over the barrier before it shut him off completely. Greg, watching, tried to shut off the re-creator. It was too late. The dictator seemed to swell.

With a sickening, bursting sound, he fell to the floor in a welter of blood. Iron, forming within him, had torn his body apart.

THE three cruisers came to rest on the plain beside the fort. Close range blasts from the heat_____ore open the doors.

Running into the gloomy building, Greg turned his atomite rifle on the thin wall of iron behind which Joan lay. As it melted away he could see her, still lashed to the steel framework.

Then he was cutting her bonds, carrying her toward the ship.

"Greg!" she whispered, a ghost of a smile on her wan features. "I . . . I knew you would come!"

"Joan!" he moaned hungrily.

Watching them, old Zoab nodded soberly. "That also is re-creation," he said. "The greatest force of all has created for them a new world, a new life, a new understanding."

"And for us?" Bar El rumbled.

Zoab stared at the red Martian desert.

Swift dusk was quickly turning black. Beyond the horizon, though, he could see the lights of Mercis—white, pure—hopeful.

"We have our world again," he breathed. "It is enough."

"Aye," Bar El boomed softly. "It is enough."

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I wanted to stick in. And the editor advised me that, although I was a nice guy and two people had written in to him that they liked to read my stuff, that the policy of THRILLING WONDER STORIES was to include other yarns by other authors in the same issue. So I had to break it off short. So don't ask me what became of the poor devils who were transported to the fifth dimension. I never had time to find out. I didn't even have time to make love to Kay Lowderdale. You see, a writer's life has a lot of disappointments.

A WORLD IN BONDAGE

THE future will see our modes of transportation changed; our sources of power will be different; our geography will be altered, encompassing the nine planets. Everything will change—except man! At least, that's the story the science-fiction writers are telling.

It's a lamentable plight that most writers envision for posterity. Golden science propels man upward. But human traits anchor man to the slime from which he arose. For, if we are to believe the science-seers, man will still war with his neighbors, still yearn for imperialistic conquest. And we can't blame the writers, in view of the present world state.

Anyway, if it's consolation, Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., has written THE TYRANT OF MARS to prove to us that Earth has no monopoly over dictatorships. Here's how the author arrived at the central idea for his tale:

The base of THE TYRANT OF MARS is the transformation of energy to matter. In our experiments with uranium... a series of experiments perfected since the writing of this story... we approach the conversion of matter into energy. Once this is completely solved, and sober scientists assure me that it's only a question of time, the reverse process, that of energy into matter can conceivably be worked out.

One of the points in the yarn that rather pleased me was that of an asteroid upon which the air had been trapped in the interior rather than on the outside as on earth. My theory was that since the outer crust of a world should cool first, the gases in the core should be trapped.

And since a tiny asteroid would cool through and through very quickly, these gases, including oxygen, would also cool, and the contraction of the outer crust might exert sufficient pressure to put them in a liquid state. Thus we might have a little world with atmosphere on the inside and its inhabitants drilling shafts to reach oxygen, just as we drill for natural gas on Earth. Anyhow, it leads to interesting possibilities.

THE TYRANT OF MARS was the second science story I ever wrote, completed in February, 1938. I'd very much like the readers' reactions to it, to find out whether I've improved or slipped since then. What's the verdict, fans?

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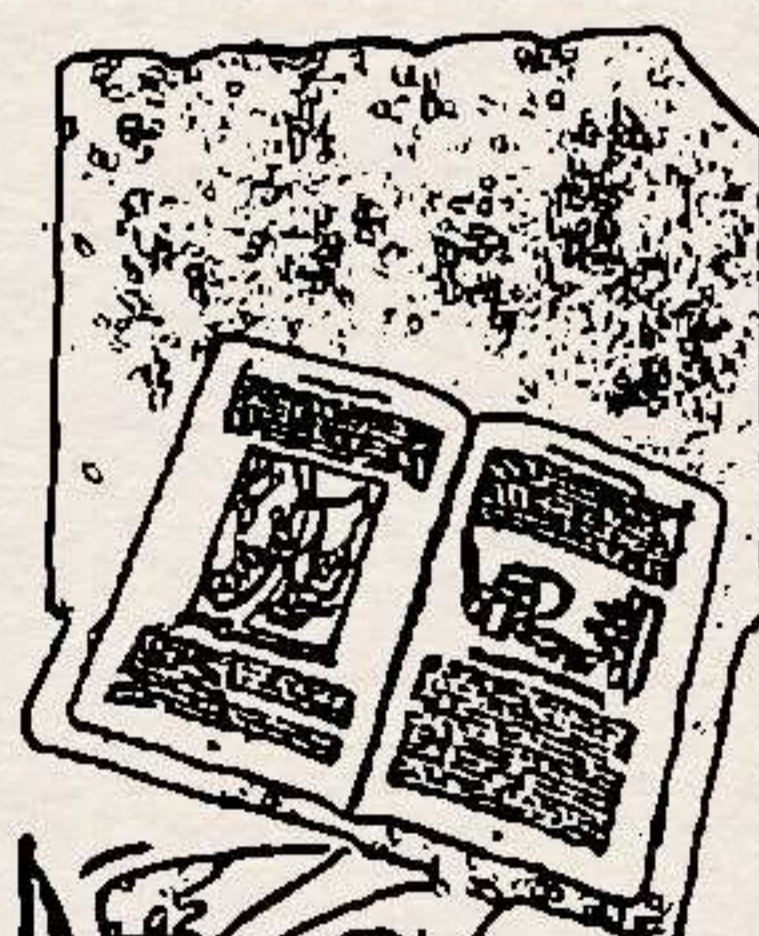
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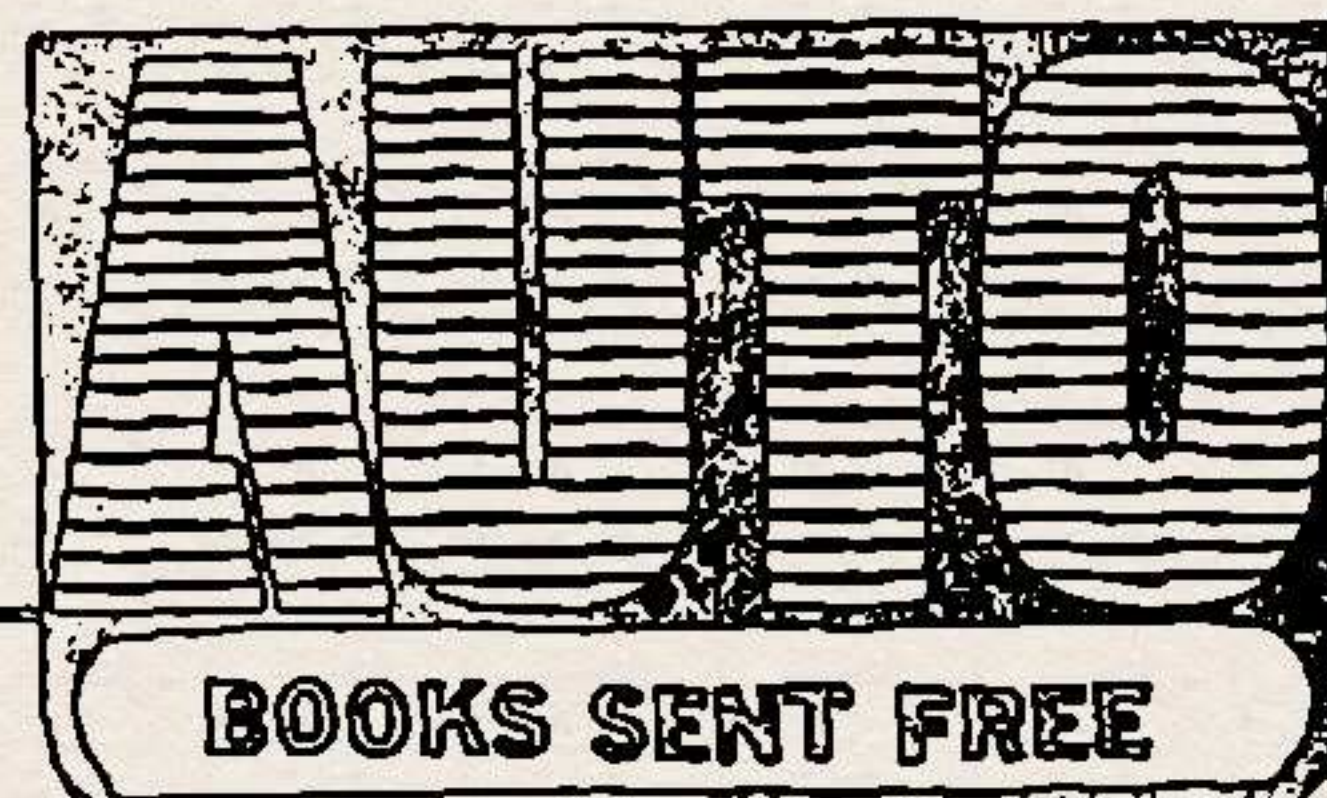


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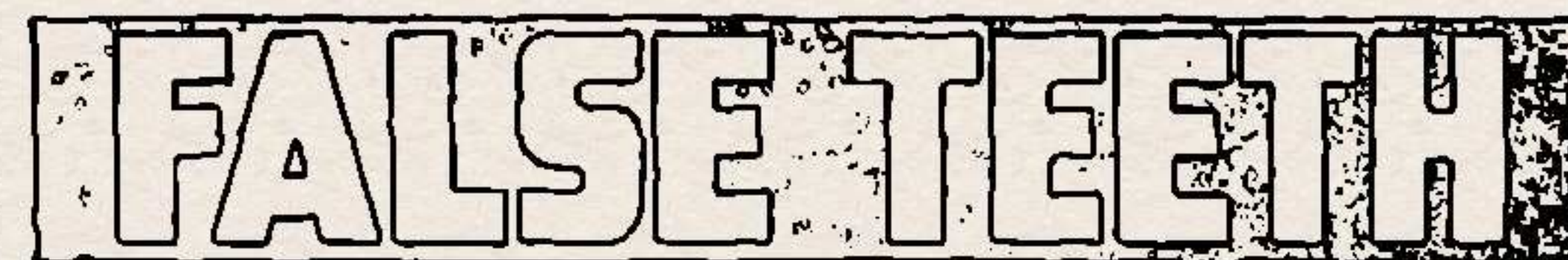
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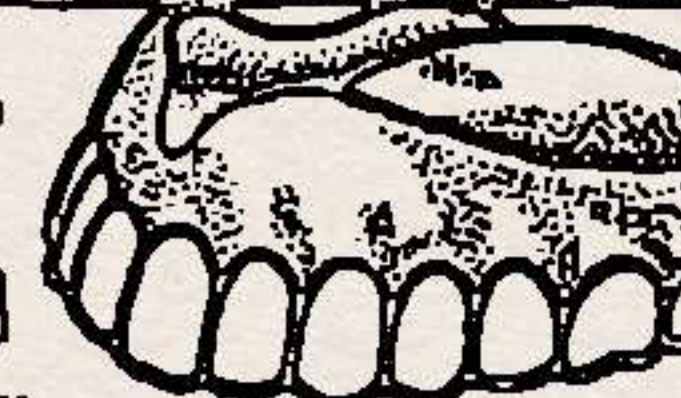
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